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# Hookah: A Fun Fad or Harmful Habit?

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# HOOKAH: A FUN FAD OR HARMFUL HABIT?

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Science with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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\*\*\*\*\*

Western Kentucky University  
2014

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## ABSTRACT

Hookah smoking has been a well-known activity in the Middle East for hundreds of years. More recently, hookah has become a worldwide phenomenon, especially in the United States of America. It is important to know why people choose this habit, and specifically why teenagers and young adults are becoming the main frequent users.

An interview session consisting of a questionnaire was the methodology used in this study. This session involved a total of twenty individuals. Ten of these individuals were people who actively participated in smoking hookah. The other ten subjects were individuals who do not engage in hookah smoking.

After the questionnaire was filled out, the researcher discussed the effects that hookah smoking has on the overall health of the individual. The researcher also compared the similarities of smoking hookah and cigarettes. Last, the data were analyzed to determine if there are significant differences among subjects who choose to smoke hookah and those who do not.

Results reveal that of the twenty college-aged individuals, ten of the subjects actively participate in hookah smoking while five subjects have tried hookah before. Results indicated that it was common for the subjects who smoked hookah to also have friends who actively engage in hookah, as well (eight out of ten subjects). Of the twenty

subjects who participated in the study nineteen concluded that smoking hookah was harmful with one subject noting they did not believe hookah to be harmful. It was concluded that five of the subjects who do not actively participate in smoking hookah have tried the fad before, but all stated that it made them sick, nauseas, or lightheaded when they previously tried hookah.

Keywords: hookah, cigarettes, peer pressure, college

Dedicated to the Western Kentucky University Dental Hygiene Class of 2014  
and the faculty and staff who helped shape us into the dental hygienists we have become.  
We did it!

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract .....	ii
Dedication .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Vita.....	vii
Chapters:	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Review of the Literature .....	3
3. Methodology .....	8
4. Results.....	10
5. Conclusion .....	12
References.....	14
Appendix.....	15

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Hookah smoking has been a well-known activity in the Middle East for hundreds of years. More recently, hookah has become a worldwide phenomenon; especially in the United States of America (Eissenberg, 2013). Hookah smoking involves burning flavored tobacco that is heated by charcoal, which creates smoke that is then filtered through water and ingested through the mouth using a hose (New York Hookah Fiend, 2011). Some people may wonder why people choose to smoke hookah. What exactly is the big attraction? It is important to know why people choose this habit, and specifically why teenagers and young adults are becoming the most frequent users. It is astounding how popular hookah smoking is becoming among college-aged individuals. Approximately 1 in 5 (20%) college students reported past-year hookah usage (Grekin, Ayna, 2012). Despite the fact that hookah is a growing, trending activity in America, the effects it has on the oral cavity and overall health are considerably worse than smoking cigarettes. Do these users realize the harmful effects that come with hookah? What are the reasons for wanting to partake in such a harmful habit?

#### **CE/T Statement**

What are the reasons that younger individuals choose to start smoking hookah? What is the nature of the factors involved? Of course, it is easy to think the appeal is the

flavoring and the slight buzz the tobacco gives, but is it more than that? Are people being pressured to do this? Or, do people simply think it is all fun and games, not realizing the harm it is doing to their body and oral cavity? Often, social drinking and smoking are common among younger individuals; perhaps smoking hookah is the same way. Maybe smoking hookah is “what everyone is doing”. These are a few factors that may be leading to the popularity that hookah is gaining. Prevalence of hookah smoking is on the rise and is attracting more people than ever before in the United States (Eissenberg, 2013).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature concerning the new fad of hookah smoking among college-aged individuals and the overall health effects it has on the body involves several different aspects. Aspects that are involved in this review include education on what hookah is, the significant trend escalating among college-aged individuals, similarities of hookah smoking and cigarettes, and the effects that hookah has on the oral cavity, as well as the overall health of an individual. This chapter will examine current knowledge on the subject.

#### *What is Hookah?*

Hookah smoking involves burning flavored tobacco, by charcoal, in an apparatus consisting of a head, a body, a flexible hose, a mouthpiece, and a bowl (Eissenberg, 2013). Hookah smoking is also commonly referred to as waterpipe, narghile, shisha, or goza. Although the history of hookah smoking indicates that it is predominantly a Middle Eastern practice, it is becoming a worldwide phenomenon, including in the United States (Holtzman, Babinski, Merlo, 2013). Hookah is available in almost any flavor imaginable, including coconut, watermelon, cherry, apple, and cappuccino. The flavored tobacco is heated by charcoal, which then creates smoke that is filtered through water and ingested into the mouth through a hose and mouthpiece (Eissenberg, 2013).

Hookah is traditionally smoked in a group setting or in “hookah lounges”. Hookah lounges, also referred to as hookah bars, are where individuals can go and purchase a flavored tobacco and share pipes that are established at the lounge (Jarrett, Blossnich, Tworek, Horn, 2012). Typically, hookah is smoked in a session that can last anywhere from thirty minutes up to an hour or more.

### *College-Aged Persons and Hookah*

Hookah smoking has existed for centuries and its use is more recently beginning to increase in the United States. One common trend seen with hookah smoking is the increased use among university students and young adults. Why are these young individuals so attracted to this new fad? There are several factors that could lead to these individuals picking up this habit. First, hookah tobacco is relatively inexpensive and lasts for more than one session. Second, hookah can easily be purchased through online sites that rarely monitor the restricted age limit, thus giving an appeal to underage users who can easily access the product. Third, smoking hookah has become much like social drinking. Many individuals participate in this activity due to the social scene that is brought with it. Hookah bars/lounges are on the rise and specifically popping up around college campuses. Fourth, the flavored aspect of the tobacco attracts students who particularly do not like the unflavored tobacco, which was traditionally used in hookah. Last, but certainly not least, young individuals are not educated on the harmful effects of hookah smoking. Many young adults mistakenly feel as if hookah is safer than cigarettes,

thus thinking it is not as harmful as smoking cigarettes. A common misconception is that the substances of hookah are not as harmful as the substances in cigarettes (Grekin, Ayna, 2012).

In one study, it was recorded that hookah has a high social acceptability even among non-users, and that hookah use is correlated with other high-risk behaviors such as increased cigarette use, marijuana use, and alcohol use (Jarrett, Blosnich, Tworek, Horn, 2012). In another study, results concluded that students believe they were more likely to be influenced by friends to use hookah as opposed to cigarettes and that friends looked “cooler” when using hookah versus cigarettes (Grekin, Ayna 2012). A few studies revealed a significant relation between college-aged individuals and hookah smoking. The first study reviewed was among 943 students ranging in age from 17 to 35. Each participant completed a survey that contained questions regarding smoking hookah. Of the participants who responded, 42.9% (N = 404) reported that they have smoked hookah and 40% of those individuals (N = 162) had used it in the past 30 days (Holtzman, Babinski, Merlo, 2013). In the second study, a review of literature from 16 studies was gathered on the use of hookah among college-aged individuals. Results indicated that approximately 1 in 5 (20%) college students reported past-year waterpipe smoking. In comparison, approximately 30% of college students reported past-year cigarette smoking. Although cigarette smoking remained the most popular form of tobacco use among American college students, hookah was a close second (Grekin, Ayna, 2012).

### *Hookah Compared to Cigarettes*

What most hookah users do not realize is that smoking hookah is very similar to smoking cigarettes. Hookah users also have the misunderstanding that hookah is not as harmful as cigarettes, thus further promoting the use. Hookah tobacco contains many of the same substances as cigarettes including nicotine, tar, and heavy metals. Hookah tobacco also contains the byproducts from the charcoal used to heat the tobacco. When comparing cigarettes and hookah, the World Health Organization (2005) reported that a single-hour session of hookah use is approximately the equivalent to the smoke inhaled by smoking 100 or more cigarettes (Jarrett, Blosnich, Tworek, Horn, 2012). The prolonged pattern of inhalation of smoke and the exposure to nicotine is what makes hookah smoking so dangerous. In one study, it was concluded that carbon monoxide exposure was about twice as high in hookah smokers as in cigarette smokers (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2008). Studies show that a typical cigarette smoker inhales about 0.5-0.6 liters of smoke from a single cigarette whereas a hookah smoker may inhale as much as one liter of smoke with each puff (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2008).

### *Effects on Health*

It is no surprise that smoking hookah has harmful effects on the body. Typically, hookah is chosen as an alternative to cigarettes because of the perception that it is not as harmful. Studies indicate that hookah smokers absorb high levels of toxins and carcinogens that may contribute to the development of heart disease, lung cancer, and



respiratory diseases (Harvard Mental Health Letter, 2008). In addition to systemic issues, risks of acquiring infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, Herpes Simplex virus, and hepatitis from sharing mouthpieces is also of concern (Jarrett, Blosnich, Tworek, Horn, 2012). Among other diseases, hookah has also been associated with low birth weight in pregnant users and an increased incidence of periodontal disease (Eissenberg, 2013).

### *Summary*

The review of the literature has looked at what hookah is, the new fad of hookah smoking among college aged individuals, the relationship between cigarettes and hookah, and the overall health effects it has on the body. Further research is needed for further examination between the relationship of hookah smoking and young adults, as well as the long term effects that hookah has on the body.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This research study examined specific factors that influence college-aged students to use hookah. An interview session using a questionnaire took place involving a total of twenty individuals. The researcher posted on a social media network requesting the need for participants in a survey on the use of hookah. Ten of these individuals were people who actively participate in smoking hookah. The other ten interviewees were individuals who have never smoked hookah. Information that was gathered among hookah users included: frequency of use, personal beliefs regarding safety of use, length of time they have used hookah, other forms of tobacco used, and the main appeal of hookah (Appendix A). The ten individuals who report no hookah use were also given a questionnaire assessing demographics as well as the reasons for choosing not to participate in hookah smoking (Appendix B).

After the questionnaire was filled out, the researcher discussed the effects that hookah smoking has on the overall health of the individual. The researcher also compared the similarities of smoking hookah and cigarettes. After discussing the facts about the negative effects of hookah, the interviewees were asked if they were aware of this information, especially the individuals who are currently involved in hookah smoking. Results were analyzed to determine if specific factors were more likely to be associated with an individual's decision whether or not to use hookah.

The purpose of this project was to determine the reason behind why individuals choose this harmful habit, as well as to educate the interviewees on how bad hookah is for the body and oral cavity. The next chapters will present results and discuss how these results can be used to improve knowledge and overall health.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter will examine findings from the two questionnaires (Appendix A and B) given to the ten individuals that smoke hookah and the ten individuals that do not. The first questionnaire given to the subjects assessed demographics and the use of hookah. The interviewees were Caucasian individuals, six males and four females ranging from the age of twenty to twenty-six. All ten of the interviewees stated they smoke hookah on a regular basis. Twenty-year-old college student Noah stated, "I like the buzz I get from smoking hookah and it's fun to do when I am hanging out with all of my friends." Results show that the main reason for participating in hookah smoking was for the social aspect associated with it. Gash, a twenty-one year old college student noted "he only smokes hookah when he is with friends." Eight of the ten interviewees concluded that their friends smoke hookah on a regular basis. Nine out of the ten individuals believed hookah to be harmful with only one stating that he did not believe it was harmful. Ashley, a twenty-three year old college student, stated, "I think smoking anything is harmful, for the simple fact that you are inhaling smoke which is harmful to your lungs." Ten individuals confirmed a history of smoking hookah for at least one year, and eight of these individuals used other forms of tobacco products while two did not. The main attraction of hookah smoking was for the social scene, the flavor, and the

buzz. Research shows a significant link between those who smoke hookah also being involved in other forms of tobacco.

The second questionnaire (Appendix B) assessed the demographics as well as non-hookah use in individuals who do not actively participate in hookah smoking. The subjects included Caucasian individuals, eight females and two males ranging in age from twenty-one to twenty-four. All persons revealed that they did not have a desire to smoke hookah and three of the ten stated that hookah made them sick when they tried it. Twenty-three year old college graduate, Jessica, stated, "I prefer not to put unnatural chemicals in to my body and have no desire to smoke hookah." Seven of the interviewees revealed that their friends do not smoke hookah regularly while three interviewees stated some of their friends did. Of the ten subjects studied, all concluded that hookah was harmful. Twenty-one year old college student Maggie noted, "Hookah is harmful to an extent if smoked regularly and often." In addition, all ten individuals stated that they did not use any other form of tobacco either. Results concluded that of the ten subjects who do not actively participate in hookah, five persons had tried hookah before while the other five had not. All five who tried hookah but are not currently active smokers stated that it made them sick in some form whether it was physically sick or lightheaded. Alicia, a twenty-two year old student, stated, "I have tried hookah before because my friends and I thought it was cool (it's not) and it choked me every time I would try to smoke it!" In the next chapter, practical applications of these results will be discussed.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The previous chapter analyzed the data on the usage of hookah smoking. Hookah smoking has become a worldwide phenomenon, especially in the United States of America. Some people may wonder why hookah smoking is becoming so wide spread and what the big attraction is. More so, why are young adults the main users? After an analysis of the research, a significant number of the subjects either actively smoke hookah or have had a history of trying hookah. Fifteen of the twenty subjects who filled out a questionnaire noted smoking hookah often or had at least tried hookah before. Another trend was the usage being with all college-aged individuals. Although one subject was unaware of the harmful effects of hookah, the other nineteen were aware that hookah is not a safe alternative to smoking cigarettes.

Since hookah smoking is becoming widespread and surrounding college campuses, it would be beneficial to spread the awareness on the rise of hookah. Due to the increase on college campuses, implementing programs and seminars on hookah to educate college students could become a very crucial factor in decreasing the prevalence of hookah smoking among college-aged individuals. It is important to educate users on the negative effects on the body and oral cavity, as well as to explain that hookah smoking is as harmful as cigarette smoking. With a seminar for upcoming freshman college students, the researcher believes this will help tremendously in reducing the

amount of individuals who become interested in trying the new fad of hookah smoking. From interviewing subjects, the researcher believes that these first-time users are not aware of the harmful effects that can arise from hookah. Results showed that the flavor, the buzz, and mostly the social aspect of hookah smoking are all attractions to the new fad. It is crucial to educate these college-aged individuals on the harms and effects on hookah, and there are many different ways this can be done. Altogether, hookah smoking is on the rise and education on this new fad should be done in order to properly gain the knowledge on the harm of hookah. Furthermore, it is important to educate the individuals who are most likely to begin hookah smoking, college-aged individuals.

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## APPENDIX A

1) What is your gender?

2) What is your age?

3) What is your ethnicity?

4) Do you smoke hookah on a regular basis?

If yes, what is the main reason for smoking hookah often?

If no, what is the main reason for not smoking hookah often?

5) Do your friends regularly smoke hookah?

6) Do you think smoking hookah is harmful?

7) How long have you been smoking?

8) Do you use any other form of tobacco?

9) What is the main attraction of hookah for you?

## APPENDIX B

- 1) What is your gender?
- 2) What is your age?
- 3) What is your ethnicity?
- 4) Why do you choose to not participate in hookah smoking?
- 5) Do your friends regularly smoke hookah?
- 6) Do you think smoking hookah is harmful?
- 7) Do you use any other forms of tobacco?
- 8) Have you ever smoked hookah (tried hookah)?

If yes, why did you quit/stop?